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ABSTRACT

Although community colleges currently account for over half of minority enrollment in America, there is controversy regarding whether the colleges actually provide minority students with access to higher education or merely track them into low-level studies. A number of barriers to success face minority community college students, such as inadequate college prep programs at inner-city high schools, inefficient or culturally-biased assessment methods, and cuts in federal financial assistance. Moreover, nearly 90% of these students are in developmental programs and many are either adult learners, foreign-born or -educated, field-dependent learners with an external locus of control, or lacking self-esteem. Changes occurring in many states to remove developmental programs from universities also reduce the likelihood of minority students achieving bachelor's degrees. To address these issues, colleges have begun to employ comprehensive and innovative methods to retain and matriculate minority students. New York's Borough of Manhattan Community College, for example, maintains a family day care network to train caregivers; operates a pre-freshman immersion program for reading, math, and writing; and works with businesses to obtain alternative sources of financial aid. Other efforts include the Minority Transfer Opportunities Program at Texas' Houston Community College and innovative articulation agreements developed by Ohio's Cuyahoga Community College. (Contains 27 references.) (BCY)

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Developmental Education: Are Community Colleges the Solution?

Roosevelt Littleton, Jr.

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Developmental Education: Are Community Colleges the Solution

by

Roosevelt Littleton, Jr., Ed.D

Currently, community colleges account for over half of the enrollment of minorities in America. A controversy has development over how well minority students are being served . On one hand, community colleges are praised for providing open access to higher education. However, critics claim that community colleges track minorities into low-level studies, thereby, reducing their chance of obtaining a bachelor degree. The article discusses the role community colleges play in educating developmental minority students. Issued concerning the community college include: (a). factors affecting minorities' success in community colleges; (b). a profile of minorities enrolled in developmental programs; (c). a discussion of proposed changes in developmental education; and (d). a summary of community college efforts to retain minority students.

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BIOGRAPHY

Roosevelt Littleton, Jr., has served as the Dean of Student Life Services at Abraham Baldwin College and Mary Holmes College. The Patricia Roberts Harris fellow received the Ed.D. in Developmental Education-Student Development and Personnel Services at Grambling State University in 1994. The Jackson, Mississippi native received the Master of Science in Education degree in Educational Technology (1982) and the Bachelor of Science degree in Mass Communications-Television and Radio Production (1981) at Jackson State University. In addition, Dr. Littleton earned the Associates of Applied Science in Commercial Design and Advertising (1979) at Hinds Community College.

The educator and researcher has published several scholarly articles on; developmental education, at-risk students, nontraditional students; adult development; and student development theories. The author is a member of numerous professional and scholarly organizations, which includes the following: the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS; THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS; THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BLACK SCHOOL EDUCATORS; PHI DELTA KAPPA; AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION.

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INTRODUCTION

Community colleges were historically created to provide open access to adults, high school graduates and others who could profit from community college instruction. Currently, community colleges account for over half of the enrollment for ethnic minorities in America (National Center for Education Statistics,1991), and a controversy has developed over how well these students are being served. On one hand, community colleges are praised for providing open access to higher education. However, critics claim that community colleges track minorities into low-level studies, thereby, reducing their chance of obtaining a baccalaureate degree (Cohen, 1980).

Amidst the turbulent civil rights struggle of the 1960s, the community college emerged as an economic vehicle for the upward mobility of Blacks, Hispanics, and Women. During that era, the community college experienced rapid growth of its vocational and technical programs. The 1960's civil rights struggle was also marked by Black Americans demand for equal access to the nation's institutions of higher learning. During the 1960's the community college offered Blacks and other minorities access to traditonally white institutions of learning, while remaining unchanged in its basic structure (Zwerling and Wilson, 1986).

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Before the 1970s, the community college curriculum was predominantly academic in course offerings. The Vocational Education Amendments of 1968, the availability of millions of federal dollars, and state and local matching grants gave community colleges the primary role in offering vocational and technical education (Wilson & Melendez, 1983). Blacks and Hispanics were already disproportionately represented in high school general and vocational tracks. An analysis of the distribution of minorities within community colleges find them residing on the outskirts of "traditional" education.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE SUCCESS OF MINORITIES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

There are many barriers that justify the limited progress of minorities in community colleges: (a).inadequate college prep programs; (b).selective admission policies and test assessment; and (c).federal financial aid. Minority groups, especially Blacks and Hispanics, suffer from inadequate secondary school preparation, ineffective counseling, economic racism, and psychometric barriers. Many Black and Hispanic students express interest in postsecondary education, but often fail to meet regular admission standards,because they were channeled into non-collegiate programs in high school

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(Lavin, Alba, and Silberstein, 1979).

Inadequate college prep programs

Many critics of the inner city high schools correlate the failure of its minority students with the school's inadequate funding, underprepared teachers, biased administrative policies, and Eurocentric curriculums. A majority of inner city high schools do not offer a college-preparatory curriculum. Many of the inner city instructors hail from teacher education programs that were deficient in resources, facilities, and lack a curriculum that includes multicultural awareness and counseling courses.

Counselors to minority students in nonacademic programs very likely perceive these students "to be poor material for higher education and counsel them accordingly" (Lavin,Alba, and Silberstein, 1979; Wilson 1985; Riggs,et.al,1990; and Summers, 1990). The aftermath of inadequate counseling reflect student selection of collegiate studies. As a result, many minorities tend to avoid competitive college programs and enroll into vocational-technical programs.

Selective admission policies and test assessment

Enrolling in college can be a traumatic experience for many minority students. Community colleges are perhaps in the

lead when it comes to the assessment/placement of students. Since 1984, nearly thirty-two states have raised high school graduation requirements, either through more stringent curriculum requirements or by requiring exit tests, and nearly thirty states have increased admission standards for state colleges and universities (Mitsgang, 1985; Conciatore, 1991; Hammons; 1987; and Cohen, 1980). Minorities traditionally score lower on standardized test than Whites; the raising of required test scores is seen as a direct factor of limited educational access for numerous minority students. Lewis (1985) noted,

> "Raising standards tends to benefit those students who already perform well, but does not service those students performing poorly. Raising standards does not make a difference, if no change in teaching strategies or enrichment of learning experiences are provided for minority students.

Over the past decade, community colleges have experienced a tremendous increase in diversity of students. More people of color are enrolling in higher education. This diversification has created a need for new types of assessments to place entering students (Riggs,et al,1990). Currently, the assessment used by community colleges is inefficient in assessing the learning styles of culturally

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diverse study bodies (Conciatore, 1991; Wilson, 1985; Arellano and Ofelia, 1987; Cohen, 1989; and Hughes and Nelson, 1991).

Test validity, reliability, norming procedures and criteria used to place students into college are based on decisions by educators. Specific issues include: what is proper to measure; what instruments should be used; and how measurements or assessments should be done. These decisions rest upon values which are influenced by varying sociopolitical attitudes and beliefs (Bers and Smith, 1991).

Many consumer advocacy groups, civil right organizations and legislators remain concerned about bias in testing and question the predictive validity of instruments, and decry the lack of empirical evidence available on the effects of assessment procedures on ethnic minorities and the disabled (Kanter, 1990; and Lunneborg and Lunneborg, 1985). Currently, community colleges employ standardized tests to screen admission to many technical and occupational programs.

Federal Financial Assistance

Conservative federal government policies of the 1980's & 1990's, have resulted in astounding cuts in financial aid, Head Start, child care and other social programs that have

benefited the poor. The Reagan and Bush administrations weaken and dismantled numerous social and education programs. Their conservative actions were duplicated by the 1995 republican-controlled congress which issused substantial cuts in Pell grants, Upward Bound, Trio programs, Affirmative action, job corp., college loan substidies, Title I, education grants, minority-based scholarships, school lunches and eliminating the Department of Education. The effects of these drastic budget cuts on minority students have been substantial and costly.

MINORITIES AND DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Nearly ninety percent of minority students enrolled in California are in (developmental studies) community colleges. Kanter(1990) noted that,"Community colleges are faced with an overwhelming number of students classified as 'underprepared'. Of 6,000 students enrolled in St. Phillip's College in San Antonio, TX, 3800 are taking developmental educational courses. There is a serious concern about who community college educators are targeting and defining as underprepared and the delivery systems for serving these students (Conciatore,1991).

Several labels are used to describe the developmental

student: deficient; low ability; high-risk; underachiever; nontraditional; slow; remedial; disenfranchised;disadvantaged; underprepared; returning; and at-risk. Such labels can limit student growth by demoralizing their self-esteem and self-concept.

Developmental education students generally share two of more of the following characteristics:

1. not prepared by high school curriculum for college level work.
2. adult learners returning to school.
3. academic or physical weakness not detected in secondary school.
4. foreign born who acquired their elementary or secondary education in a foreign country.
5. field dependent learners.
6. possess an external locus of control.
7. lacking self-esteem and achievement motivation.
8. score high on measures of anxienty (Epps,1969).

Developmental education is considered an organization concept within postsecondary institutions. The services of developmental education have evolved and expanded to facilitate the nature and needs of culturally diversed

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students. The primary goal of developmental education is to provide academic assistance to those underprepared students who are attending colleges and universities. Developmental education programs are structured to provide students academic and support services through; developmental courses ;tutoring; study labs; computer assisted instruction; counseling; peer support groups; and orientation seminars.

PROPOSED CHANGES IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

The current trend of tracking developmental students into community colleges appears to suggest that many educators consider at-risk students (e.g., Blacks, Hispanics, Asians) unsuitable for four year colleges. Many state and private universities (e.g., Mississippi, California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois) have raised their standardized admission scores, thereby limiting the access of Blacks and other minorities. As a result, many minorities may find the only avenue in attaining a college degree will involve enrollment in the (developmental classes) community colleges.

The 1992 Mississippi State College Board records reported 2,867 of 55,000 college students were enrolled in one or more developmental courses in 1990-91. The developmental courses

covered the basics of reading,english,and mathematics and carried no credits toward degree requirements. Developmental students are often required to take two or three semester long courses, making the pursuit of their college studies longer and in many cases undesirable.

During the 1992 spring Mississippi Legislature session, bills were introduced which suggested tracking developmental learners (Blacks) into community colleges. The State senate bills suggested that developmental education courses be eliminated at the universities and taught only at the community college level. Similiar bills were introduced in Texas, Illinois, and Florida. Fortunately, the legislation was defeated, its passing would have had a profound effect on the enrollment and mission of the nation's Historically Black colleges and universities.

Many educators believed that community colleges should not be designated as remedial institutions. Community colleges are noted for their success with developmental students. However, community colleges enroll traditional as well as advanced students. Community colleges are already overwhelmed and overburden with dilemmas: overcrowding, a growing transfer population,and redefining their missions to addresses the needs of a culturally diversed student body and workforce.

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Tight budgets and overcrowding have caused many states to look at the community college as a cheap route to a baccalaureate degree. In Utah, California, Arizona, Georgia, Texas, and Virginia, legislators considered several proposals that would haved converted the community colleges to extensions of 4-year colleges (Mercer,1992). Those proposed changes included: (a).offering baccalaureate degrees at some two-year colleges; (b).offering a 3-year baccalaureate degree at the community colleges; (c).using community colleges as feeder schools for the colleges; (d).converging the two-year college into a four year college; and (e).proving grants to private colleges that accept community college graduates, due to overcrowding of state colleges. If criteria like grades were used to divert prospective four-year students to community colleges, the students who would be disproportionately referred to community colleges would be Blacks and Hispanics. Many educators suggested that the aforementioned criteria proposal would only increase the number of minorities warehoused at community colleges and reduced their likelihood of attending a four-year college (Mercer, 1992).

EFFORTS COMMUNITY COLLEGES UTILIZE TO RETAIN MINORITY STUDENT

The problem of retaining Black and other minority community college students is vastly evident. Community colleges must secure alternative, comprehensive and innovative methods to matriculate its minority students. Numerous community colleges have devised student-oriented programs to address the academic needs of its minority students.

To counteract government cutbacks in financial aid programs that have contributed to the negative trends in minority enrollment, The Burrough of Manhattan Community College has initialed a program to address their dilemma. The BMCC program objectives include: (a). the college works with city, state, and community organizations to address a diverse array of community needs through its continuing education program; (b). BMCC developed an innovative family day care network which trains men and women to operate licensed programs in their own homes; (c). a Pre-Freshman Immersion Program provides intensive instruction in reading, math, and writing, as well as tutoring and counseling to high school graduates who have been admitted to BMCC; (d). junior high and high school students are brought to campus for extra preparation in math and science; (e). articulation with four-year colleges is an institutional priority; (f). the business sector has been approached as a source of alternative financial aid funding; and (g). the college has implemented a

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number of efforts to enhance pluralism and diversity (Winchell,1990).

The Houston Community College system (1984) has organized the Minority Transfer Opportunities Program, a special effort to facilitate the transfer of minority students to four-year institutions through academic advisement and support services assistance. The Houston Community College (MTOP) program's objectives include the following: (a). improve students self-esteem; (b). have eighty percent of the participants declare a major and file a degree plan emphasizing transfer; (c). promote student participation in out-of-town, campus-centered activities; (d). successful transfer of students to senior

institutions; and (e). develop a joint enrollment plan with the University of Houston.

In attempting to help students overcome both personal and structural barriers to higher education, Cuyahoga Community College (CCC) in Ohio has focused primarily on a strategy of inter-institutional articulation, seeking to smooth the transitions which students must make from secondary schools to two-year schools to four-year schools. The major elements of change affected by CCC's articulation approach are curricular improvements, academic and support services, development of student information systems, and enhancement of transfer

agreements and opportunities (Ellison, 1987).

Kingsborough Community College's New Start Program was developed to assist the students who meet criteria, yet fail to achieve satisfactory grade point averages at senior colleges (Winchell, 1990). Research has shown that academic failure of such students is often caused by maturational difficulties or mismatches between college and student, rather than by lack of ability (Tinto, 1990). These students were admitted to Kingsborough in good academic standing and thirty of their previously earned credits were used toward the associate degree; their former academic averages were not carried over into their Kingsborough averages. In addition to being offered the college's extensive support services,program

participants were invited to special orientation, registration sessions, and were given individual counseling design to meet their needs (Winchell, 1990).

SUMMARY

To avoid the continuing trend of greater division between the educated majority and the undereducated minorities, there must be concerted efforts to build partnerships for the

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purpose of improving access, opportunity, and success of high school students enrolling in community and four-year colleges. It seems only logical that senior colleges would qualify as leaders in providing progressive programs of academic development. Specifically, colleges and universities maintain schools of education, counseling and sociology with professors and graduate students specializing in academic research and development.

In order for community colleges to truly carry out its mission as an open admission institution, it must make implement and update policies, programs and services to address the nature and needs of its culturally diversed students. Those enhancements should include: multicultural social activities; better test assessment tools; improved counseling/advisement efforts; hiring additional minority faculty and administrators; faculty-student interaction; innovative teaching strategies; curriculum case studies; student support services; establishing a retention program; smaller classrooms; effective articulation strategies; and a reallocation of financial aid (Wilson, 1985; Tinto, 1990; Richardson, 1990 and Zwerling and Wilson, 1986; Winchell, 1990 and Ellison,1987). Higher education must expand their efforts toward retaining nontraditional and minority students.

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